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CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

How a Christian Selects a Candidate

By Doris Webster Havice

How do *you* pick a candidate for pub- c office? Are there any *special* qualities Christian looks for in a candidate? re there different ways of judging a erson who has never run before and one ho is seeking re-election? These are me of the questions many of you have een asking CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY nd other social action leaders for some me. I am going to give you the answers heard when I posed these questions in ree different social action workshops in hich I was involved this past summer.

Has a Christian any *special* qualities e looks for in a candidate? Most people hought there were, although there were few who denied this, on the ground hat there were no qualifications which were too high for a person in public ffice. The qualities that a Christian ooks for ranged all the way from Does he attend church?" to "Is he eally anxious to improve the society in which we live?" Some put it in terms f not being subject to pressure; others, more accurately, in terms of being inter- sted in the greatest good in the long un. After discussion all groups ad- mitted that church attendance itself was poor diagnostic tool. All agreed that it makes a good deal of difference *what* ressures a person is subject to, but that man who could not be swayed by public need at all would be of little value in ny office. All agreed, too, that criteria drawn from personal, moral habits were ot very useful—such as, does he smoke, oes he take a drink, is he kind to dumb nimals? These were ruled out, not be- cause they aren't interesting data to have on people but because it is possible to conceive of both very good and very bad candidates who could answer all these questions in the approved fashion.

What about a *Protestant* Christian? Does he ask different questions from other Christians? Should a Protestant vote for a Roman Catholic candidate? Oh yes, we talked about this too! Almost everybody concluded that the more basic question is—"Is the candidate interested in the welfare of all the people or is he apt to be biased in favor of some of the people or some of the institutions in society?" In other words, we decided it was entirely too simple to decide on a candidate simply on the ground that he belonged to an authoritarian church, for we had seen some people whose loyalty to Catholicism had sharpened their concern for people in general and others who became concerned for the power of their Church rather than the welfare of the people.

Are there different ways of judging a person who is running for re-election? This is easy. Of course, it is much

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News of Social Action Happenings Around the Country

While we are thinking about Christian Citizenship it is refreshing to see a story from Wasco, California. Before last Spring's elections for city officials eight candidates for three offices in Wasco were invited to speak at a rally sponsored by the Social Action Committee of the First Congregational Christian Church. All eight candidates responded, and told the assembly of their ideas regarding a number of issues of community concern: Should the police department come under Civil Service regulations? What can be done to introduce light industry into a community largely dependent on agriculture? How shall we take action on substandard housing in our city?

The rally received wide attention in Wasco. This is a good way for churches to develop citizen concern for community problems.

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Message of the National Conference on "The Churchman as a Citizen"

The September issue of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY *contained a brief report on the Churchmen's Conference in which some 120 men of the United Church of Christ, meeting on the campus of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pa., June 20-22, considered the theme "The Churchman as a Citizen." Printed below is the Message adopted by the Conference at its closing session. It is hoped that this Message will stimulate further thinking on this important theme among many groups throughout the church.*

We, churchmen of the United Church of Christ, called together by the Laymen's Fellowship of the Congregational Christian Churches, the Churchmen's Brotherhood of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and the Council for Christian Social Action, meeting at Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania, June 20th-22nd, 1958, have explored the question of the Christian's responsibility for citizenship in our time. We have given earnest consideration to the problems that beset our society and to the insights of the Christian tradition that bear upon them. We have been made aware of the sinfulness of man which makes our problem difficult and the grace of God which meets us in our need. As an outcome of our deliberations, we concur in the following expression of our common convictions and call upon the members of our Churches to consider them earnestly.

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Message of the National Conference

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I. OUR RESPSONSIBILITY

The practice of good citizenship is an essential part of the Christian life. As Christians we cannot and must not avoid responsibility for political affairs. God is Lord of all of life and all our relationships must be tested in His light. It is unthinkable to suggest that this particular area be excluded from His scrutiny. We acknowledge that the Bible gives us basis for the view that citizenship is a responsibility of Christians. We confess that, if we love one another as our faith dictates, we must work with one another in this area as in others.

We hold that it is our responsibility to contribute to political life; to vote; to vote intelligently; to vote for men, policies, and parties that serve the common good; and to continue to express our concern after voting by maintaining an active interest in those men, policies, and parties—offering support where deserved and expressing critical judgment where warranted. As Christians we recognize both a corporate and an individual responsibility for creating and maintaining more wholesome attitudes toward politics. Government is an institution necessary to human welfare, freedom, justice, and order.

We have an obligation as practicing Christians to work for improvement of democratic policies and practices. We must labor to the end that political life does not become an area of corrupt evil influence, of self-seeking, of demogoguery. If the political arena does suffer such a fate, we cannot remain aloof from active participation on the pretext that to engage in politics would "soil our hands." Christ gives us the example of what our behavior should be. He faced controversial issues even though He knew He would meet opposition and endure suffering.

Where there must be compromise as to policies and programs, we need to call on God to guide us through the working of His Holy Spirit, through the preached and written Word, through the Church. The fear of compromise must not deter us from participation or from continued effort for more adequate embodiment of Christian objectives. Acknowledging our human limitations, we can work for justice, thus bearing witness to the Kingdom of God.

II. AREAS OF CONCERN

Various groups in the conference gave their attention to current problems of concern to us as churchmen and as citizens. One of these observed that a major danger to our civil liberties today is the indifference of people who either do nothing to defend and extend their freedoms or make decisions superficially without thorough study of their purposes and effects. Another group drew attention to a wide variety of issues which concern Christians—ranging from racial relations and care of the aged to pressure groups and objectionable and unethical advertising. Another group underscored the importance of education as a Christian concern because of its immediate and far-reaching effect upon persons. It felt that both individuals and groups should address themselves to their responsibility for meeting the present and future needs of our schools.

In our interdependent economy, problems of employment, wages, inflation, social security, and abundance were felt to be important to us as Christians and a rightful concern of our government. Some emphasized the importance of conserving our natural resources, not only for our own use and for the use of future generations but also to share with famine-stricken peoples and weaker nations. Others felt the need to press for balanced production of farm products for use both at home and abroad, diminishing the use of acreage controls and increasing attention to soil conservation practices.

In international relations, the belief was expressed that it is our Christian concern not only to resist communism but by enlightened policies of mutual aid and reciprocal trade to help other nations to help themselves. It was recognized that such policies are helpful to ourselves as well as to others. Now that the two sides of the world conflict possess weapons with which each can destroy the other, we must more than ever give attention to resolving existing tensions and to prevent a war which may lead to the extermination of life on this planet.

The conference did not solve these problems but agreed that all issues which affect the welfare of people are important for Christians who are committed to love their neighbor as themselves.

III. WHAT THE CHURCH AND CHURCHMEN CAN DO

The Christian Church, as a community faithful to its Lord and His ministry of reconciliation, inevitably influences the common life of a society. Even when it has no direct political intent, it nourishes in men the purposes and values which guide their political activity. Often it concerns itself more directly with political goals. It encourages some of its members in careers of public service, and all of its members in responsible citizenship. Through its agencies and its public declarations it appeals to the conscience of the nation. In areas of controversy it has a double responsibility: on the one hand, to testify without fear or favor to the ethical meaning of the Christian faith; on the other hand, to help men discuss and understand their honest disagreements within the Christian community.

Among the recommendations were the following:

For Individuals: 1) to exert influence through the family; 2) to influence civic groups from without and within; 3) to support law and order; 4) to use one's mind and become informed; 5) to initiate and support worthy civic projects; 6) to register and vote intelligently and to keep informed as to the candidates' activities when in office; 7) to participate in political party organizations; 8) to read accurate, informative materials on social issues; 9) to encourage and support the minister in standing for Christian principles in political life; 10) to help others examine social issues in the light of the Christian faith.

For Church Groups: 1) to sponsor educational programs on social problems; 2) to cooperate with other groups within and outside the church; 3) to help form a vigorous social action group within the church; 4) to become acquainted with the candidates and office-holders and how they stand on issues; 5) to declare their own positions on social issues; 6) to utilize council, conference, synodical and national resources.

For Local Churches: 1) to use denominational statements for study and action; 2) to use denominational publications, periodicals, and other resources; 3) to make the churches available for community meetings; 4) to help recognize Christian vocations in civic and political activities.

For Associations, Synods, and State Conferences: 1) to conduct conferences on Christian Citizenship in their own regions similar to this conference at Ursinus College; 2) to offer the churches in their areas information and suggestions for action on local, state, and national issues.

For Denominational and Interdenominational Bodies: 1) to supply literature on political affairs; 2) to conduct seminars on legislative issues; 3) to maintain liaison with government in Washington, D. C.

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It is our hope that these considerations and recommendations will enlarge the vision and increase the vitality of the United Church of Christ.

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Reports of the Conference may be secured from the CCSA office at 25 cents each.

Social Action Around the Country

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And then there are some Americans who have difficulty getting registered to vote! One of our pastors sent us a copy of a Georgia newsletter which reports efforts of church leaders in several Southern states to help Negroes to become registered voters. In many churches in North Carolina, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi weekly classes are held, and thousands of new voters have been instructed and successfully qualified. The report indicates that in one state Negroes "register and vote freely in only six of the eighty-two counties . . . Only 22,000 of the state's 900,000 Negroes are now registered." What's wrong there?

* * * *

The Oregon Fellowship of Congregational Christian Women has been working to improve legislation which seeks to terminate Federal control over the Klamath Indians in that state. Groups of women were asked to seek amendments to Public Law 587, amendments to provide for Federal purchase of Klamath land, to insure sustained yield management of valuable timber tracts.

* * * *

Women's groups that are looking for stimulating programs might take a hint from the Women's Fellowship of the New Hampshire Congregational Christian Conference. They conducted a series of eight forums on Social Action throughout the state, with 600 women participating. Discussions, which were based on two themes, "The BIBLE Speaks Today" and "The CHRISTIAN Speaks Today," emphasized the relationship of the Bible to common concerns of modern life, and the responsibility of Christians to be involved in affairs of community and state.

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The Social Action Committee of North Illinois Synod has begun the publication of a bi-monthly sheet entitled "Facts of Life." In the first issue Committee Chairman George Nishimoto wrote: "It is our hope that we can honestly face THE FACTS OF LIFE objectively and helpfully, so that every Christian and every local church can respond positively to the different problems they may face. We are convinced that the influence of the Christian church can be a powerful force within every community for GOOD. And we hope to report the progress and purpose of your witness through these bi-monthly publications."

Members of the Council for Christian Social Action are frequently asked to speak about Christian social action, to tell what it is, and why. A recent letter from one of our members, Rev. Everett W. MacNair, pastor of Plymouth Church in Milwaukee, tells of "field work" experiences in three churches in the Milwaukee area. At one place part of the discussion had to do with "whether to expect the church to take action as a whole. I tried to show that there was a half way measure between that and individualism. The church appoints, finances and encourages a group to handle issues, resulting in opinions which are the group's only, and not those of the church." This would seem to be good procedure in many situations where it is not easy to secure a vote of an entire congregation on a pressing issue.

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On this same point we want to quote from an article written by Rev. John B. Forsyth, Minister of Parish Activities in the Bushnell Congregational Church in Detroit. A committee on Christian social action, he says, "has the right to recommend action by individual members of the congregation. Committee members may not say, 'We represent the official opinion of our church' unless they have taken a vote at a meeting of the congregation. But a committee may well say, 'We have studied this question carefully. In our opinion certain things should happen. We urge members of the congregation to register their convictions upon this question with our representatives in Congress.' This does not commit the church to a position. The committee speaks only for itself, which it has always a right to do.

"Sometimes a committee can create such interest in a problem, that a special group is appointed by the church to take action. Thus the responsibility passes out of the hands of the Social Action Committee, which can then turn its attention to other matters. One committee developed interest in a program for older adults, until a special group was created to plan such a program. Another committee urged the adoption of displaced persons until this project was undertaken by the church as a whole."

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The Oneida Courier, mimeographed monthly bulletin edited by C. A. Edson for the Oneida, N. Y., Association reported the discussion of "The Churches' Responsibility to the Aging," at the Association's spring meeting. "The later years are often as bitter as gall . . . Can the Christian church be indifferent to these conditions, these needs?" When the New York State Conference met at Jamestown soon after that it dedicated the Hall Memorial Home for the Aging and arranged a workshop on the implications for local church programs at the same time.

Other synods and conferences are working toward establishing homes for the aging, and expanding present facilities. Is yours?

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Do property values really go down when people of color buy homes in all-white neighborhoods? This question was explored recently in a human relations seminar at First Congregational Christian Church in Redwood, California. Leadership in the seminar was given by Dr. Luigi Laurenti, member of the research staff of the Commission on Racial Housing of the Fund for the Republic, which made studies in twenty neighborhoods in San Francisco and Oakland, California, and in Philadelphia, Pa., over a twelve year period, 1943-1955.

The answer to the question is: No. In some cases property values actually go up! All the neighborhoods studied by Dr. Laurenti's Commission had been all-white in the early 1940's, and then became mixed. Homes involved had prices ranging from $7,000 to $22,000. Each neighborhood was compared for price behaviour during the 12 year period with another as similiar as possible. In two-thirds of the cases the area with non-whites showed a higher increase, or a lesser decrease. In the other third the price behaviour in the all-white area was better.

Why did prices in the integrated areas hold better levels than those in all-white neighborhoods? Several reasons were given: 1) neighbors did not panic when the first non-white moved in; 2) the non-white market was a strong one; 3) there was a housing shortage in those years; and 4) non-whites were eager to move were in a good financial position.

But even good financial strength does not help all Negroes to obtain good housing. The better educated ones, and those who are in higher income brackets can sometimes find decent financing. But the Negro John Doe, who has an ordinary job, is up against lower first loans and higher interest rates!

SOCIAL ACTION CALENDAR

October 7-9—World Order — United Nations Seminar, New York, N. Y.

October 19—World Order Sunday.

November 4—Election Day.

November 10-11 — Consultation on the Church and the Farm Problem, Kirkwood Hotel, Des Moines, Iowa.

November 18-21—National Study Conference on the Church and World Order, National Council of Churches, Cleveland, Ohio.

February—United Church of Christ Month of Emphasis on Christian Social Action.

February 3-6 — Churchmen's Washington Seminar, Washington, D. C.

February 5-7—Council for Christian Social Action, Buck Hill Falls, Pa.

February 8—Race Relations Sunday.

Time to Think And Act — Now

With crises emerging almost daily in various parts of the world, Christians will utilize soberly the opportunities which are ours now, to think and act with a view to international statesmanship and good will. A look at the above calendar suggests some of them.

The World Order—United Nations Seminar may still be a possibility for those who act quickly. If in doubt send $6.50 registration to the New York office of CCSA and come anyway! World Order Sunday should be observed in every church, with the World Order Message a good basis for further study.

Above all, do not overlook the position of the candidates on international trade, economic development, and technical aid when you vote. Here is one place we can all influence foreign policy.

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How a Christian Selects a Candidate

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simpler to test the integrity, the vision, the common sense, the capacity for hard work of someone whose record is before you. You aren't nearly so likely to mistake high sounding phrases for the real thing if you can match the phrases to work done or left undone. And thereby hangs a tale! Most well-meaning people tend to overlook what has *not* been done. Many city councils are made up of men who have been re-elected again and again because they never did anything bad. Christians have no right to equate the good with the not-bad. Good candidates get discouraged when they are never encouraged to *do* something but only admonished *not* to do something.

This leads me to another topic which came up inevitably—the care and handling of office-holders after they are elected. This may seem by the way, but it really isn't. Your best men are not going to run again if you haven't given them the satisfactions which are legitimate in the job. What are these? Obviously, we don't want them to be subject to graft and inordinate influence peddling. What *do* we want them to get out of the term of office? They need to know they have done some good. They need to know that there are some people, at least, who know this. But local, state and national office holders all say the same thing: "We hear from you only when we've done something wrong. You never praise us for what we have done right." One of the sad aspects of this is that this failing is much more characteristic of the "good" people than it is of the ward bosses and the special interest boys. They are much smarter. They always let the man in office know when they are pleased.

Well, what about the man who is running for the first time? How are we going to know whether he is really interested in the general welfare, really has integrity, will really work hard at serving the people? Well, he presumably wasn't born yesterday. He went to some school or schools, he participated in some voluntary community projects, or he didn't. He belongs to a party and the party has a record of choosing candidates because they are strong or because they are weak. He has some backers. Are *they* interested in progressive, constructive programs? In small towns it is possible to know a great deal about a person without knowing him personally. But, even in larger towns there is a device open to everyone which can get your candidates to declare themselves on the crucial issues. The Candidates' Meeting often run by the League of Women Voters and the Junior Chamber of Commerce is a natural and sound method to get citizens interested in the important issues before the voters and to find out what, if any, kind of stand the candidates will take on these issues. If a Candidates' Meeting cannot be arranged the local newspaper will often print your candidates' written answers to certain leading questions. Beware of the man who won't say what he thinks! Usually, he is afraid to act later as well as now.

We summed up these discussions by saying that as Christians we expected informed, intelligent, honest candidates who were concerned with the welfare of all the people, not just some of them. But we came away from each discussion impressed not only by the need for better candidates but also by the obligation the voter has to be a more dedicated Christian voter. After all, we get pretty much what we deserve in this as in other fields, and when one looks at what has happened in Little Rock this summer this is a very sobering thought.

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Doris Webster (Mrs. Frank P.) Havice, of Boulder, Colorado, is Christian social action chairman of the National Fellowship Congregational Christian Women After doing graduate work at Columbia University and Union Theologicial Seminary, she was one of the first women to receive a fellowship at Edinburgh University. Presently teaching in the department of philosophy at the University of Colorado, Mrs. Havice has been elected a member of the Council for Social Action.